Title: Representations of Utopian Urbanism and the Feminist Geopolitics of 'New City' Development

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Cite as: Lynch, Casey R. (2018) Representations of Utopian Urbanism and the Feminist Geopolitics of 'New City' Development. *Urban Geography.* doi: 10.1080/02723638.2018.1561110

Abstract

Increasingly over the past few years the building of new cities "from scratch" has become a key strategy to promote development across much of the global South. While several projects are currently under construction, many others exist primarily or exclusively as proposals awaiting adequate investment or government action. This paper builds on previous literature that considers representations of such projects—promotional materials, digitally-produced video simulations, and master plans—as key components in the production of imagined urban futures. Through an exploration of the proposed Zone for Economic Development and Employment (ZEDE) in Honduras—imagined as a modern new city on the coast of the Gulf of Fonseca—this article demonstrates a feminist geopolitical approach focused on how such representations of utopian urbanism circulate through the local communities slated for new city development. I examine how different representations of the proposed project as both future urban space and future urban governance regime become appropriated by local residents in organizing opposition, while also becoming entangled the material conditions of the region and in personal hopes, anxieties, and fears around violence, "development", and land tenure.

Keywords: New Cities; Representation; Feminist Geopolitics; Utopian Urbanism

1. Introduction

The first decades of the 21st century have seen a new wave of planned city-building projects throughout the Global South, driven by discourses that see efficient, well-planned, and well-governed new cities as the key to "development" in the age of transnational neoliberal capitalism (Datta and Shaban eds. 2017). These projected future cities seek to emulate purportedly successful urbanization processes in places like Dubai or Hong Kong, while incorporating the most advanced digital technologies (smart cities) and concerns for environmental sustainability (eco-cities). Despite their claims to futurity, these projects recycle imaginaries and strategies from postcolonial modernization projects (Datta 2015), as well as longer histories of colonial planning and urban development (Moser 2015), often reinforcing existing inequalities and state and corporate abuses.

In the recent wave of "new city" projects around the world, representations of cities-to-come—from planning documents and promotional materials, to contracts and laws—are key components in the broader assemblages through which such spaces are constituted (Jazeel 2015; Watson 2014). These representations circulate through a multiplicity of spaces—from government offices and international meetings, to corporate board rooms and real estate developer websites—eliciting desires and coordinating efforts for an urban future in the making. What has been less explored is how many of these representations also circulate through rural and marginal communities in the areas projected for development. While many of these projects claim to develop cities on previously "empty land" (Watson 2014), such discourses often work to erase the lived realities of marginal and rural communities on whose dispossession and displacement these schemes rely (Goldman 2011; Hsing 2012; Datta 2015).

Confronting this erasure, this paper argues for a feminist geopolitical perspective that

puts the focus on the lived realities of a diversity of people as they experience such projects first hand. In particular, understanding how utopian urban *representations* circulate in such communities—and how individuals and collectives make sense of them, form opinions, and organize actions in relation to them—can help shed light on how the recent wave of "new city" projects are experienced "on the ground." It can also show how such projects may be open to contestation as the visions of planners necessarily confront the social and material complexity of space—as Datta (2015) has explored in the case of Dholera, India.

By focusing particularly on *representations*, I build on Jazeel's (2015) call to recognize how discourses of utopian urbanism function as "a spatial signifier that performatively precipitates its own material manifestation" (p. 30) and reflection that such "representational fields are key battlegrounds for critical urban geography" (p. 27). I also build on Smith's (2017) work on the Vision 2030 project in Nairobi, which seeks to reorient debates on master-planned city-building projects "towards a more speculative, open-ended approach which recognises how digital simulations, consultancy reports, billboards and images of the future city act in the world" (p. 33). Indeed, many communities facing such projects encounter these discourses and representations long before processes of infrastructure development, dispossession, and displacement actual begin—if they ever do.

In the case of the project to create a Zone for Economic Development and Employment (ZEDE) in the Gulf of Fonseca, Honduras, I explore how local residents encountered multiple representations of a speculative urban future projected on the lands where they live and work. Encountering and interpreting these representations, they formed opinions regarding the proposed project, reconfiguring their visions and expectations of the future. I show how several factors influenced the way the representations were interpreted differently by different people.

While some people's opinions were rooting in ideological opposition to the project, many others conducted a kind of rough calculation of how one and one's family may be able to fit into the projected visions. What kinds of knowledge, skills, education, and resources do they have at their disposal that might allow them to become the imagined urban subjects of the future ZEDE? Key to this calculation were previous experiences of violence, hopes and anxieties in relations to "development", and uneven and contested relations of land-tenure—as speculation regarding future development intensified longstanding struggles over land and resources. These representations also became the focal point of early opposition organizing, as local grassroots movements employed them in counter-discourses informed by alternative visions of "development."

Below, I offer a brief discussion of methods and then situate the ZEDE project in the context of contemporary Honduras. The remainder of the paper is divided into four main sections. Section 2 reviews existing literature on the recent wave of "new city" projects around the world, focusing particularly on the role of representations. I then consider how those representations could be approached from a feminist geopolitical perspective to understand the embodied and emplaced contexts in which they are encountered and shape experiences of new city discourses as either promise or threat. Section 3 explores two distinct forms of representations in the case of the Gulf of Fonseca ZEDE, representations of future urban spaces and representations of future urban governance. Section 4 examines how these multiple representations of the ZEDE circulated through local communities in the Gulf of Fonseca (hereafter, GOF) in the months following the project's announcement in 2014. I examine how various opposition groups made use of these representations to inform and mobilize the local population. In Section 5, I consider how residents differentially made sense of these

representations in relation to previous experiences and complex histories of violence, "development", and contested land tenure.

1.1 Methods

This work is based on three months of fieldwork in the GOF in the summer of 2014, as well as several shorter trips to the region and to the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, between 2012 and 2016. The primary fieldwork period in 2014 was key, as the announcement of the GOF ZEDE was first made in April 2014. In the following months, many residents first began encountering representations of the ZEDE and forming opinions in relation to it. During this time, I conducted participant observation at community meetings and events in the three municipalities targeted by the ZEDE and participated in community workshops hosted by local organizations involved in resistance, keeping detailed fieldnotes about my observations and experiences. I conducted fifteen key informant interviews with local resistance organizers, municipal governments representatives, planners, and project leaders in the national government. Living in the region during this time, I also had many informal conversations with local residents from a variety of backgrounds as they sought to make sense of the ZEDE project.

1.2 Situating the ZEDE in Honduras

As of the writing of this article, no Honduran ZEDE exists in any established material form. Rather, the ZEDE is *imagined* as an ultramodern city with its own legal, economic, administrative, and political (LEAP) system governed by an appointed board of international libertarian technocrats known as the Committee for the Adoption of Best Practices (CAMP, by its Spanish acronym) and an appointed Technical Secretary. The project's promoters cite Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Chinese Special Economic Zones like Shenzhen, as inspiration for the ZEDE model, highlighting the way special sets of free-market-oriented rules and procedures

promote investment and urban development (Lynch 2017). While inspired by such external referents, the ZEDE project can also be seen as the latest in a long line of utopian experiments in "development" either imagined or attempted in Honduran territory, from Scottish pirate Gregor MacGregor's imagined Republic of Poyais in the early 19th century (Hasbrouck 2011) to the fruit company and railroad enclaves of the early 20th century (Barahona 2005) and the existing Export Processing Zones dating back to 1976 (Geglia 2016).

The ZEDE concept was the outcome of a lengthy political and legal process beginning in the aftermath of the 2009 coup d'etat, in which right-wing politicians and military leaders overthrew left-leaning President Manuel Zelaya and installed a conservative National Party government in boycotted elections riddled with irregularities and human rights abuses (COFADEH 2009; Estrada, 2013; Pine 2015). In the years following the coup, the National Party government formed partnerships with several international advisors, proponents of a series of related neocolonial and "utopian enclave libertarian" imaginaries in which new cities would be built through private investment on land ceded to either a foreign government—a proposal that was eventually rejected—or an international board of experts. The most extreme utopian versions of this vision call for the division of the territorial nation-state into fragmented, competing jurisdictions managed by privatized "government service providers" and populated by mobile citizen-consumers who are called to "vote with their feet"—opting in to jurisdiction that best fits their needs (Lynch 2017).

An initial law, constituting autonomous *Regiones Especiales de Desarrollo* (RED), or Special Development Regions, was passed in 2011 and then declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2012, following legal challenges by a collective of grassroots social movements, including indigenous, Afro-indigenous, and peasant rights groups. Months later, the

Supreme Court justices responsible for the ruling were illegally removed from power in what came to be seen as a judicial coup d'etat, and new legislation was passed early in 2013 constituting the Zones of Economic Development and Employment, or ZEDE. This vision came to be known colloquially in Honduras as "*ciudades modelo*" or model cities.

Throughout this process, the projected site of the first model city was unclear, while most speculation focused on the Caribbean coast. Investors linked to Silicon Valley showed interest in the coastal city of Trujillo and the surrounding lands—an area long the focus of national development imaginaries and home to a large Garifuna afro-indigenous population involved in longstanding struggles over land rights with national elites and international investors (Brondo, 2013; Mollett, 2014). While plans for an eventual Trujillo ZEDE continued behind closed doors, in April 2014 President Juan Orlando Hernandez announced that the first ZEDE would be located in the Gulf of Fonseca on the Pacific coast, supported by funds from the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). The Gulf of Fonseca ZEDE is promoted as part of a geopolitical reimagining of Honduras as a future crossroad of global trade. In this vision, a major port and logistics center in the GOF connects to the Caribbean coast via a modern railway—known as the dry canal—allowing Honduras to compete with the Panama Canal and the future Nicaraguan Canal in the transport of global cargo.

The projected site of this new city, the Gulf of Fonseca, is one of the poorest regions in Honduras. A majority of residents work in subsistence or small-scale commercial agriculture or aquaculture, in small-scale tourism, or as low-wage laborers in the commercial shrimp-farming industry (Stonich, 2001). The region has a history of conflict over land dispossession and environmental degradation, due in part to the expansion of the export-driven shrimp-farming industry (Stonich 1995). While the original RED law called for development on purportedly

'empty' lands, the ZEDE legislation has no such requirement and pre-approves all "low-density" coastal areas like the GOF for possible conversion into a ZEDE without the need for a referendum. The projected ZEDE focused on three municipalities: Amapala, Nacaome, and Alianza. The majority of the area is classified as "low-density" and thus pre-approved for ZEDE development.

2. Representations of Urban Futures and Feminist Geopolitics

Following the announcement of the ZEDE in the Gulf of Fonseca, residents in the area began learning about the proposed project through a series of representations, including promotional videos, discourses propagated by the news media and local officials, and the text of the ZEDE law. This section sets up a framework for understanding these representations and their role in 'new city' projects globally. I first consider how such representations are understood in existing literature on similar large-scale city-building projects, and then consider how those representations might be approached from a feminist geopolitical perspective.

2.1 Representations of Space and New City Development

I highlight three main approaches in the literature on 'new cities'. The first approach highlights representations of the imagined city as a future urban space and a vision of modernity. A second approach looks at the policy frameworks, forms of 'expert' knowledge, and governance regimes through which such projects are pursued. Finally, a third approach considers how 'new city' projects are experienced and contested by communities facing displacement and dispossession.

Scholars have examined new city projects across China (Caprotti, 2014; Morera, 2017), India (Datta, 2012; Datta 2015; Kundu, 2017), Southeast Asia (Moser 2010), the Middle East (Moser et al, 2015), and Sub-Saharan Africa (Ilesanmi 2010; Lane 2017; Watson, 2014; Watson,

2017; von Noorloos & Kloosterboer 2018). Datta (2017: 2) highlights how such city-building projects across regional contexts "are represented through impressive simulated walkthroughs, interactive maps, charts and graphs," while Morera (2017: 190) points out how "the design of eco-cities in China has been distinctively characterized by the abundance of images as a form of communication of the ideas."

In all of this work, the various representations of the imagined city are key pieces of data by which scholars come to know and speak about particular projects. For example, Watson (2014) examines a series of projected city-building projects across sub-Saharan Africa by analyzing the contents available on developers' websites and promotional materials. Moser et al (2015) offer a preliminary analysis of the master plan for King Abdullah Economic City and consider what it means for processes of economic liberalization in Saudi Arabia; while Lane (2017) explores the multiple forms of power at work in the production of the master plan for Lusaka, Zambia and the institutional structures on which it relies.

In postcolonial contexts, representations of new cities are often used to project an image of modernity (Moser 2010). They act as geopolitical tools for promoting investment and projecting a future-oriented, business-friendly environment internationally. These representations reproduce discourses and imagery from broader transnational urban trends around "smart cities" or "eco-cities" as an attempt to claim status in an economy dominated by a handful of "global cities" (Sassen 1991; Brenner, 1998), representing a new realm of 21st century "entrepreneurial urbanism" (Harvey, 1989; Abrahamsson and Ek, 2014; Datta 2015). Many of these projects also make use of images of existing iconic cities like Dubai, Singapore, or Hong Kong, in an attempt to project a comparable status for the city-in-the-making. References to these cities are

widespread throughout the transnational discourses on new cities, regardless of any substantive connection or similarity to such places.

Yet, how to interpret these representations, the kind of discursive work they do, and their relationship to material conditions on the ground is often unclear. As Jazeel (2015) points out, it is not uncommon in the literature on new cities for the power of the representations and discourses around such projects to obscure their current state of development. Indeed, these projects often only exist on paper and in the minds of planners, policymakers, and real estate developers—or otherwise may be in an early stage of infrastructural development. Even cities that have been completely built may remain mostly empty years after their formal completion, as in the case of China's "ghost cities" (Sorace and Hurst, 2016). Nonetheless, these representations are indeed important, as they help us understand the values, visions, and relationships of power that inspire and drive the development of new cities.

Other authors have explored the reliance of 'new city' projects on new forms of policy experimentation, and their role as key sites of contemporary geopolitics. As Datta (2017: 3) writes: "Fast cities are produced from the geopolitical trajectory of a 'city-in-a-box' (Lindsay 2011), driven by 'fast policy' (Peck 2002) and 'expert' knowledge exchange across the world." These representations work to lay the legal, economic, administrative, and political foundations for the urban and infrastructural projects pictured. In some cases, these representations work to designate the new city as a special economic zone, while in others it may constitute the city as a private space, governed and managed through a private company (Datta & Shaban, 2017). These plans and policies are often shared among cities—becoming models—through complex networks of "experts," policymakers, and institutions, who replicate and adapt policies across urban contexts globally (Bunnell & Das, 2010). Significantly, Moser (2018) shows how the Chinese

state and private enterprises employ these forms of technical and policy expertise as geopolitical tools for the expansion of Chinese interests and influence abroad. Beyond the representations of particular urban forms, I also include these policy prescriptions and forms of expert knowledge as key representations of utopian urbanism. These representations, while less flashy, work in coordination with the images and discourses discussed above, circulating through similar transnational networks, though often less visible and accessible to those on the outside.

Finally, a third strand of literature has focused on the ways 'new city' projects are experienced and contested on the ground. For example, Datta (2015) discusses the activities of Jameen Adhikar Andolan Gujarat (JAAG)—or Land Rights Movement Gujarat—in opposition to processes of dispossession and displacement in the development of Dholera Smart City in India. Similarly, Kundu (2017) examines anti-displacement struggles in relation to New Town Rajarhat, Kolkata. She employs the notion of "perforations" to "understand how grand master plans are ruptured, altered, tweaked and constantly redrawn, producing a shifting geography of contested claims at the periphery" (Kundu, 2017: 125). In contrast, Smith's (2017) discussion of Nairobi's Vision 2030 project highlights the way representations of a future modern city—and its contrast to current lived realities—elicit both hopes and anxieties from ordinary Nairobi residents, reorienting personal aspirations for the future.

In this paper, I build on all three strands of new city research. I examine both the representations of utopian urbanism and how they circulate, becoming key objects around which individuals and communities form opinions and, in some instances, begin organizing in opposition to new city development. Like Smith, I highlight how such representations elicit both hopes and anxieties from local residents. Yet, while Smith focuses primarily on the circulation of representations of future urban spaces, I show in the case of the Honduran ZEDE how these

representations circulate alongside representations of urban policy and governance. Significantly, I frame this approach through the lens of feminist geopolitics as a way to draw a more direct relationship between Smith's focus on the lived experiences of urban residents and other authors' analysis of new city projects as the site of geopolitical maneuvering and transnational competition for investment.

2.2 Feminist Geopolitics

While the myriad representations discussed above can be seen to play important geopolitical roles, projecting images of stability, progress, and modernity, attracting international investment, or laying the foundation for new forms of governance or international cooperation, they often also circulate in the rural and marginal communities facing potential or imminent displacement from new city projects. Calling for the 'grounding' of geopolitical analysis in the everyday lives and embodied practices of the oppressed and marginalized, a feminist geopolitical lens can help shed light on how these representations circulate at a local level and with what effects (Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman 2004; Sharp 2007; Williams and Massaro, 2013).

Feminist geopolitics leverages a critique of traditional geopolitics' almost exclusive focus on state actors and historical complicity with practices of colonialism and imperialism. Gilmartin and Kofman (2013) highlight three major silences in contemporary geopolitics that they argue can be addressed through a feminist geopolitical lens: the evolving practices of 'new imperialisms'; the emphasis on the actions and perspectives of elite actors; and the failure to account for a diversity of subject positions. In this paper, I work to address all three silences, highlighting the ZEDE as part of a new imperial imaginary experienced by marginalized non-state actors from a diversity of subject positions with differentiated vulnerabilities.

Thus, a feminist geopolitical lens goes beyond considering how different bodies are represented or not within geopolitical discourses and practices, paying attention instead to the ways the 'national', 'international' and 'geopolitical' are inescapably entangled in the actions and practices of embodied actors (Massaro & Williams 2013; Hyndman 2001). As Dowler and Sharp (2001: 169) argue:

> This position argues for the need to think of bodies as sites of performance in their own right rather than nothing more than surfaces for discursive inscription. Discourses do not simply write themselves directly onto bodies as if these bodies offered blank surfaces of equal topography. Instead, these concepts and ways of being are taken up and used by people who make meaning of them in the different global contexts in which they operate.

Feminist geopolitics thus calls for tracing "nascent forms of power, oppression, and resistances at and between multiple scales (e.g. body, home, and nation-state)", while also drawing "attention to individuals and communities that push back, challenge, and rewrite geopolitical relations" (Massaro & Williams 2013: 567). Examining representations of utopian urbanism through such a lens calls for understanding how those representations circulate and come to affect the everyday lived experiences of individuals and communities in place. In doing so, it draws attention away from the representations themselves by bringing into focus the material conditions and "vulnerable corporealities" (Dixon & Marston 2011) with which those representations are entangled, while giving voice to alternative visions of the future.

A feminist geopolitical perspective thus re-frames residents and communities facing dispossession from new city projects as subjects and actors who negotiate such processes in emergent, differentiated, and embodied ways. While the utopian representations may erase local communities entirely, or seek to re-inscribe them as the grateful beneficiaries of "development," residents do not experience this passively, but make meaning of these representations in their own ways. This may mean adapting one's expectations for the future to a new set of possibilities

and threats, or developing oppositional discourses and representations. As Dixon and Marston (2011) show, these subject positions are not pre-given. Rather, feminist geopolitics "allow the conditions of the site in which the researcher is engaged to help specify the subjectivities that are at work, and the ways they shift and settle under different stresses and pressures." This point is key in my analysis of the ZEDE, as I highlight the ways residents differentially make sense of the representations based on individual histories and fears of violence, hopes and anxieties around development, and vulnerability to displacement and dispossession.

3. Representations of Urban Futures in Honduras

This section explores the multiplicity of representations of the Gulf of Fonseca ZEDE project. I focus on two distinct kinds of representations: those that project a particular urban form as a vision of modernity, and those that describe the political and legal structures through which promoters hope to attract investment for the project. I focus specifically on those representations that circulated through the communities in the GOF following the project's announcement in 2014.

3.1. ZEDE as Urban Utopia

Representations of the Gulf of Fonseca ZEDE as a kind of urban utopia were common in the discourses and imaginaries propagated in the months following the project's announcement. When the project was first announced, many residents in Amapala recalled a video they had been shown a year earlier depicting future plans for development on the island. Tito Livio Sierra, a government adviser, had developed a conceptual design for a port and new city in the GOF. The design was turned into a virtual tour of the space with an imagined "megaport" and tourist infrastructure on the island of Amapala, two bridges (one for vehicles and one for the railway) connecting to the mainland, and Ciudad Panacea, a planned city and logistical center in the area

around Nacaome. The video shows a large, developed city, reminiscent of Hong Kong or Singapore—the reference to which is made explicit toward the end of the video when the island's volcano is pictured with a sign reading "Welcome Asian Tigers." The video includes CGI images of an imagined campus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Mayo Clinic, modern housing blocks, shopping areas, and a solar energy plant as the "camera" flies through the different areas of the Gulf. The geopolitical imaginary of the video is clear, as it proclaims the imagined city as "the center of Central America, the center of America, the center of the world."

In August 2013, Tito Livio Sierra traveled to Amapala to discuss the plans, showing the video to residents in a public presentation. The government denies that the particular plans have any relation to the ZEDE studies carried out by KOICA. Yet, the first public reports of Livio Sierra's plans appeared only weeks after the Honduran government secretly signed its first Memorandum of Understanding with KOICA to begin feasibility studies under the RED law in 2012. Further, the—albeit limited—available information regarding the feasibility studies suggests that the KOICA plans may not be far removed from those presented by Livio Sierra.

In June 2014, the mayors of Amapala, Nacaome, and La Alianza formed part of a Honduran government delegation sent to South Korea as part of KOICA's support for the ZEDE project. Upon their return, the mayors held a series of town hall meetings with residents in an attempt to win local support for the project. The mayors' discourse sought to represent the ZEDE as a project of urban development bringing economic growth and opportunity. At town hall meetings in the villages of La Pintadillera and Puerto Grande, the mayor of Amapala described what he had seen in Seoul and other South Korean cities, mentioning the factories, modern

infrastructure, security, and economic opportunities—explaining that everyone there was able to live a good life with a good salary. This discourse was echoed by the mayor of La Alianza:

> We saw the model cities that they have there. They gave us a lot of information about what a ZEDE is. They took us to—they didn't tell us, but one understands what the point was—they are interested in making assembly plants for Samsung and Hyundai, and a metal factory they have there that is considered as the largest in the world, the company POSCO. They took us to the security center, where they have all of the screens for the country, with their security system. And they told us how they were after the war, and how they reacted after the war to get to where they are now. And with this you get a vision for how to implement a development zone. (Faustino Manzanares, personal interview 7 August 2014)

Having toured South Korean cities, the mayors returned to their respective municipalities as key intermediaries between the central government, ZEDE promoters, and the local communities, helping to present a particular representation of future urban development and its supposed benefits.

3.2 ZEDE as LEAP Jurisdiction

Beyond the representations of a future city, the project is also based on representations of the ZEDE as a "legal, economic, administrative, and political" (LEAP) jurisdiction. These representations include a series of legal texts—including the ZEDE law and the law appointing the Committee for the Adoption of Best Practices—as well as statements from government officials about the ZEDE governing framework, and news articles about the ZEDE concept—though some of these are published in English and were not immediately accessible to residents.

The ZEDE law lays out the basic structure of the zone's governing apparatus and its relationship to the Honduran state. The ZEDE is exempt from all Honduran law, with the exception of laws designating national symbols, ceding nearly all authority to the CAMP and Technical Secretary. It also designates the basic principles of the ZEDE's independent common law judicial system—which outsources the administration of justice to contracted foreign judges

and lawyers—and free-market economic model. The governing structure is meant to insure the independence of the zone from future political changes in the rest of Honduras, offering unprecedented stability to investors. Following the ZEDE announcement, hundreds of copies of the law were printed and circulated around the region, as were several summaries of the law. As discussed in the following section, these representations became a key way local residents learned about the specifics of the proposed project.

A separate piece of legislation appointed the initial twenty-one members of the CAMP. The list of members included only four Honduran citizens—all from the National Party—along with well-known libertarian figures from the United States, Europe, and Latin America, including several former members of the Reagan administration, an Archduchess of Austria, the former Georgian Chancellor, and leaders of think tanks and political action committees. Following the appointment of the CAMP, the Honduran libertarian think tank Eléutera published profiles of each member on their website. In the months following the ZEDE announcement, these profiles were also printed and circulated through local networks in the Gulf of Fonseca.

4. Making Sense of the ZEDE: Raising consciousness and organizing resistance in the GOF

With the circulation of these representations of the ZEDE, residents both individually and collectively began trying to make sense of the proposed project, and in some cases, organize nascent forms of resistance. This section explores these reactions. I first consider how early conceptions of the ZEDE were shaped by rumors and uncertainties. I then explore the early forms of opposition in the GOF—focused primarily on raising critical consciousness about the project—and how activists made use of the various representations available to them.

4.1 Rumors and Uncertainty

All of the representations discussed above circulated in the GOF following the project's announcement. Yet, beyond these representations a popular discourse spread around the region. Many people came to know the ZEDE through these rumors, mixing elements of fact with speculation and imaginative projection. While these rumors and uncertainties—and the anxieties they produce—could be dismissed as simply inaccurate and misinformed, I argue that they speak to the feminist geopolitical focus on situated meaning-making and reflect the material and informational inequalities between the elite state and transnational actors planning the ZEDE and those whose lives and livelihoods stand to be most directly impacted.

For instance, as one local fisherman told me (field notes 20 May 2014): "The Japanese [sic] are going to come and build a big city here. They build cities right on the water, like floating. We live right on the coast here and I don't know what will happen to our house. I don't think they will let us stay. I hear they want this land for tourist hotels." Other rumors took the limited available information about the ZEDE and situated it in relation the long history of exploitation of the region, as a local restaurant owner explained:

> The rich from Tegucigalpa have always done whatever they want with the gulf. They have already taken most of the beaches on Zacate Grande. The model city will just be more of that. They will build more hotels and take more land and build a place for themselves, but we won't have any place in it. They'll use it to traffic drugs through here like they do in the north. (field notes 24 May 2014)

The representations and rumors that circulated often left a number of big questions open, leading to a great deal of uncertainty in people's understanding of the project. During the town hall meetings with local residents, Amapala Mayor Cruz repeatedly mentioned that the feasibility studies and master plans were still being developed, and that they still did not know *what kind* of investment the ZEDE might bring. Likewise, the territorial delimitation of a future ZEDE was not clear. While it seemed clear where certain pieces of infrastructure, like the port and bridges,

would be located, the lack of final plans introduced a lot of uncertainty, as it was not known if a given village or town would be included or excluded from the zone. With that uncertainty came a great deal of anxiety around what it would mean to be excluded, and thus sit just on the outskirts of such a project.

Perhaps the biggest uncertainty around the representations of the ZEDE was if the project would ever be carried out at all. Residents of the GOF were accustomed to bold claims and promises from politicians that never materialized. Politicians had promised a bridge connecting Amapala to the mainland for many years, and it has never happened. It was thus common for residents to express skepticism that the ZEDE would ever come to fruition. Was this another empty promise (or threat) or was it a real project that deserved their concern, time, and attention? Many residents were not sure.

4.2 Raising Consciousness

Many of the actions in the months following the ZEDE announcement focused on what organizers saw as the need to *concientizar*—or "raise awareness or consciousness"—about the ZEDE's potential impact on the local population and combat the informational inequalities discussed above. This was seen as the first step to organize active resistance. In focusing on these practices and the use they made of representations of the ZEDE, I follow a feminist geopolitical approach described by Massaro & Williams (2013) in highlighting the agency of marginal non-state actors and their situated abilities to contest dominant discourses, resist, and produce meaning in new and different ways. Further, in showing how the representations become situated in local experiences of oppression, violence, and environmental degradation, I show how a

feminist geopolitical approach shifts attention from the representations themselves to the material conditions and embodied realities in the GOF.

Local opposition was promoted by three distinct groups in the region: peasant activists from Zacate Grande peninsula, the local environmental NGO CODDEFFAGOLF, and representatives of the Catholic Church—primarily a group of nuns based in Amapala. Using different strategies, each group sought to disrupt the official ZEDE discourse, situating it in relation to long histories of environmental destruction, corruption, land dispossession, political oppression, and social and economic inequality. By releasing public declarations, writing and distributing pamphlets, hosting workshops, and meeting with concerned residents, these organizers appropriated ZEDE representations to promote and circulate a critical discourse disrupting the normalization of the project.

Key to this strategy was to circulate the text of the ZEDE law and the profiles of the CAMP members. Opposition organizations focused little on the representations of a future city and instead focused on the political and legal changes involved in the ZEDE and the effects on individual and collective rights. Locally, the Catholic nuns played the primary role in organizing and informing residents about the details of the ZEDE law. One nun, Sister Dolores, printed hundreds of copies of the law as well as the biographies of the twenty-one members of the CAMP. As part of her regular "social ministry" actions, Sister Dolores went door-to-door across Amapala discussing the ZEDE with residents and distributing copies of the law and biographies. To facilitate discussion and inform those who may lack the ability to read the law themselves, she organized a community meeting in which residents read the law aloud and discussed what it meant. When asked about her decision to get involved in the ZEDE issue, Sister Dolores explained: "Everyone needs to come to their own decision. I don't want to tell people what to

think. But to make a decision, they need the information and they weren't getting it." (personal interview, 10 August 2014). She explains that people were shocked to learn about the CAMP, the authority granted to it, and the backgrounds of its members, fearing the "colonization" of the area by foreign businesses.

CODDEFFAGOLF is a local environmental NGO with a history of fighting environmental degradation caused by shrimp-farming, mining, and other exploitative industries in the region (Stonich, 1995). In May, CODDEFFAGOLF organized a march alongside the Catholic Church and other civil society groups in the town of Jícaro Galán that culminated in the signing of a public declaration. The declaration shows how the opposition to ZEDE development was articulated in relation to ongoing local struggles over mining activities and environmental degradation, and to the broader context of capitalist development and dispossession in post-coup Honduras. The declaration states:

> Having analyzed the chaotic situation in which Honduras has fallen, product of the massive approval of laws that compromise Honduran natural resources and national sovereignty, together we conclude that it is precisely the perpetration of the decadent capitalist system that intensifies the social, political, economic, environmental, and food crisis in which our world currently lives. (*Declaración El Jicaro*, 2014)

By situating the ZEDE project within the broader context of environmental exploitation and the social and economic inequalities, the declaration works to disrupt official discourses of "development" propagated by official ZEDE representations, drawing direct connections between the geopolitics of sovereignty and global capitalism and local material conditions. At the same time, the declaration makes explicit mention of recent laws, drawing attention to the legal and political representations often overshadowed by representations of utopian urbanism in official discourses.

In the following months, the NGO summarized the ZEDE law into a short pamphlet to be distributed throughout the region. The pamphlet sought to provide readers with the basic information about the ZEDE governing framework through a series of questions, such as "Who will govern the ZEDE?" and "What will happen to the territory?" The pamphlet explains that the territory of the ZEDE is decided by the CAMP and can expand freely through land expropriation, while also summarizing the authority given to the new governing body and its head, the Technical Secretary. The pamphlet included the complete list of the CAMP members and their respective nationalities. It concluded with a grave warning: "From a long-term perspective, we could be facing the beginning of the end of the Honduran state, progressively stripped of its territory, population, and institutions" (CODDEFFAGOLF, 2014). In this final statement, CODDEFFAGOLF moves from a discussion of local material concerns around land tenure and resources to re-inscribe the ZEDE once again in geopolitics—now framed in their own critical discourse.

The Zacate Grande Peninsula Development Association (ADEPZA) is a grassroots organization of *campesinos* with a history of organizing for collective land rights. In a declaration released in July 2014, the organization denounced the ZEDE as the intensification of a development model based on public-private partnerships, foreign investment, extractive industries, militarization, and the repression and intimidation of opposition. Concerned about possible future land expropriation, ADEPZA organized a series of workshops in local communities to educate people about and reflect on the ZEDE. The workshops sought to inform attendees about the ZEDE through an analysis of the law, while prompting critical reflection about the long history of exploitation in the region and alternative conceptions of development.

The workshop in La Pintadillera, titled "Structural Analysis from Political Economy: the 'why' of the ZEDE," began with an analysis of particular articles of the ZEDE law and sought to explain the ZEDE as the continuation of cycles of capital accumulation in which the land, labor, and resources become commodities put toward the benefit of the rich. Focusing on the themes of land, labor, and resources, the workshop asked attendees to imagine alternative conceptions of development based around community-based projects and sustainable production. In this way, ADEPZA organizers sought to disrupt invocations of "development" by the local mayors and other ZEDE supporters, by contesting what the very meaning of the term and grounding discussion in the material conditions of the region and lived experiences of its residents.

ADEPZA members were among the most vocal opponents of the ZEDE at the town hall meetings with Amapala mayor Alberto Cruz. At the meetings, activists read directly from the text of the ZEDE law, focusing on articles that transfer authority to the CAMP, pre-approve the GOF for development, exempt the zones from nearly all Honduran laws, and allow for the expropriation of land. Citing these articles, the ADEPZA activists denounced the project as an attempt to "colonize" or create a "mini-state for the rich" in the Gulf of Fonseca, explicitly rejecting the notion that the ZEDE was a simple infrastructure or investment project. Mayor Cruz consistently responded that he would not discuss a law that he did not write and instead insisted on waiting to see what kind of investment the project would bring before jumping to conclusions. Further, ADEPZA activists questioned the mayor's authority to speak on the matter at all, citing the article of the ZEDE law that dissolves the authority of existing municipalities. The propagation of the discourses questioning the mayor's authority threatened to undermine his role as intermediary between the ZEDE and the community. ADEPZA's activities reflect its members'

positions as active subjects organizing to disrupt, contest, and rewrite geopolitical narratives around the ZEDE in ways that expose the contradictions and tensions of official discourses.

5. Differentiated vulnerabilities: Violence, development, and land tenure

As residents encountered more information about the ZEDE project, individuals and collectives began asking what the project might mean for them—for their livelihoods and their futures. Fears of violence, hopes and anxieties about development, and unequal vulnerability to land dispossession became key frames through which residents differentially made sense of the ZEDE representations. This reflects Dixon and Marston's (2011) concern with "vulnerable corporealities" and the emergence of subjectivities as individuals and communities encounter new stresses and pressures while situated in the material conditions of the site.

5.1 Violence

Many residents feared that participating in opposition to the ZEDE would result in violent repression from the state. This fear deeply affected the ways some residents interacted with activists' attempt to raise consciousness around the project. For instance, while some attendees at the ADEPZA workshop later said they were convinced by the experience to work against the ZEDE, others expressed frustration that the ADEPZA organizers—who have training in Marxist thought and experience organizing land occupations in the face of physical violence—were too radical and too theoretical. As one attendee later told me: "while I am worried about the ZEDE, I don't trust the ADEPZA people… and the mayor is a good man, I think he will work to help us. If we are forced to move, I will go. I won't fight like the ADEPZA people. It's not worth dying for" (personal interview, 10 August 2014). Cases such as the one above show how residents navigate multiple competing discourses about the ZEDE, and how these discourses

become entangled in complex local social relations, considerations of personal risk or gain, and threats of physical violence. Residents take the representations available to them and make sense of them in embodied and emplaced ways in relation to past experience with the state and powerful economic interests, including the history of violent repression against activists in the region.

While some feared state violence, others expressed fear that the ZEDE would bring the broader problems of violence common in the major cities of Honduras to the GOF region. While Honduras has experienced high rates of violence in the past years, crime rates in the GOF have been notably lower. Many residents saw the area as "the last safe place in Honduras" and feared the ZEDE would change that. As one Alianza resident expressed "The ZEDE is going to bring us all the problems from San Pedro Sula. If they build big factories here, you'll have all the people from there coming to look for jobs. Right now, we're poor, but at least we don't have gangs" (fieldnotes, 15 June 2014). Others saw the ZEDE as a possible tool for illicit drug trafficking. As one Amapala resident claimed: "They want to build the ZEDE and separate it from Honduras so that they can traffic drugs through here and keep all their money in the banks. All the politicians are part of it" (fieldnotes, 6 June 2014). Such associations further fueled fears that the project would bring violent conflict to the region. Thus, both experiences of violent repression and associations between cities and violent crime and conflict were key frames through which people came to make sense of the ZEDE, disrupting the utopianism of projected urban futures.

5.2 Development

Hopes and anxieties for "development" also acted as a common frame through which residents differentially interpreted the ZEDE representations, calculating how they individually

or collectively may be able to benefit from the project. Many Amapala residents expressed hesitant support for the project, hoping it would finally bring the long-promised bridge to connect the island to the mainland, which they saw as key to bringing more goods and services to the town, and to the potential growth of existing small businesses. Many also saw the promise of a new port as potentially beneficial to the island, recognizing that moving the main Pacific port from Amapala to San Lorenzo on the mainland had been a key moment in the economic decline of the island that the ZEDE could reverse.

The bridge and the port would both supposedly bring jobs and thus reverse the trend of outmigration from the region whose population skewed older and female due to the migration of many young, male residents to Tegucigalpa or the United States for work. Indeed, several people linked their support for the ZEDE to the current reality of migration, echoing a discourse promoted by some ZEDE promoters. Celeste, an Ampala resident whose husband had left two years prior for the United States, expressed hope: "The mayor says the Koreans are going to build factories and a port here. My husband works in a factory in North Carolina. Maybe if they build the ZEDE, he can get a job here and come back" (fieldnotes, 5 June 2014). Along this vein, several local associations and groups hoped to organize the local population to benefit from these potential economic opportunities. Clara, a representative from a local economic development organization working with small businesses and cooperatives, explained: "When you see what they have planned for here, the big city and port and everything, we are worried about the scale of it. The local businesses we work with are all very small, but we are thinking of ways to organize them to maybe be able to work in the development of the project and benefit from it. I think it is the only thing we can do to assure people have a place in the model city" (personal interview, 13 June 2014).

This hope for jobs, however, contrasts other perspectives that fear the local residents will either be completely displaced or only be able to take low paying jobs in the ZEDE. As Nacaome resident, Miguel, claimed "None of us will be allowed to stay. None of us have the education needed for these jobs. I don't speak English or Mandarin. They're going to bring in foreigners and we'll all have to leave for Olancho [in the interior of Honduras] or the north. At most maybe I could clean some office" (fieldnotes, 11 August 2014). Such discourses show how the ZEDE's promise of "development" and jobs promoted by the mayor and visual representations of a future city creates both hope and anxiety for local residents, as they try to figure out how they might fit into such a future.

Even some promoters of the project recognize the enormous gap between the skills of the local population and the kind of future imagined for the ZEDE. Martin, a government planner involved in the ZEDE project, admits: "What will become of the Honduran in the ZEDE? Without some investment in human capital, they will clean the floors, collect the garbage, maybe work in construction. If Alianza becomes a technological ZEDE like they say, Honduras does not have the human capital. It will have to be foreigners" (personal interview, 22 July 2014). As the many GOF residents work in small-scale commercial or subsistence agriculture and aquaculture, such anxieties around employment and future livelihood strategies came to focus around questions of land tenure and the prospect of dispossession.

5.3 Land Tenure and Dispossession

The question of land tenure came to play an important role in the differentiated reactions to the representations of the ZEDE in the months following the project's announcement in 2014. As the text of the ZEDE law circulated, many residents highlighted the article allowing for expropriation of the land as one of the most concerning. Reflecting on this article in the context

of land tenure issues in the region, ADEPZA writes that "99% of the population does not have titles to the place where they live nor where they farm, whereby their lands and few beaches would be exposed to expropriation if the location is apt for investment, as state the considerations published in *La Gaceta* to create the ZEDEs" ("La Voz de Zacate Grande" 2014). ADEPZA again explicitly links its opposition to the text of the ZEDE law, while re-inscribing its abstract pronouncements in the material conditions of the GOF. While it is not clear where the 99% figure comes from, it is true that few local residents possess formal titles to their lands. Yet, while some claim ownership or live and work on "occupied" or disputed lands, others are tenant farmers, paying rents to local landowners.

The struggle over land tenure on Zacate Grande has a long and complicated history, which took on new significance with the announcement of the ZEDE. The entire peninsula was given to President Terencio Sierra by the government after he left office in 1903. When he died, he left the land in his will to a granddaughter, Carmen Malespín, who never claimed it. In the 1980's, the descendants of Malespín claimed the land and sold it to some of the country's largest landowners, among them Miguel Facussé and Fredy Nasser. Most of this land has since been enclosed and is guarded by private security, while Facussé and others earn money from selling carbon credits. Yet, it remains unclear who actually purchased land from the Malespín descendants, and who has forged titles.

Further, over several decades, the beaches of the peninsula had gradually been bought by wealthy Honduran business leaders and politicians, including former president and CAMP member Ricardo Maduro. With the announcement that a ZEDE would be established in the Gulf of Fonseca, this situation reached a new level of confusion, as the descendants of Malespín and their lawyers returned to the peninsula to figure out which lands they had not already sold or may

still be able to claim. Other wealthy Hondurans have also arrived, seeking to buy up the last remaining public beaches, on which many local residents rely for clamming, fishing, and the collection of other common resources. According to local reports, President Hernandez is among those purchasing land in the area, acquiring Guayaba Dorada beach in May 2014. Thus, while construction of ZEDE infrastructure has yet to begin, residents of Zacate Grande are already experiencing increased threats of dispossession as large landowners and wealthy Honduran leaders seek to exploit a complicated history of property rights on the peninsula to acquire desirable land.

Yet, this increased pressure has not affected all residents equally. Those who rent land from larger landowners have not faced the same pressures as those living on disputed lands. While tenant farmers recognize that they may eventually be displaced by ZEDE development, they believe they may be able to find other lands to rent elsewhere in the country, leaving them in a comparable situation to their current arrangement but potentially displaced from their local community connections. In contrast, other residents have been involved in long struggles over land rights, occupying lands to which they do not have a recognized legal title, and in some instances occupying lands that are actively disputed by large landowners. Without a title, they face potential displacement without the minimum compensations supposedly promised to titleholders. Likewise, as interest in the region grows, they fear new challenges to their land rights and new pressures toward dispossession. In this way, many residents differentially make sense of ZEDE representations through the lens of complex relationships of land tenure. The text of the ZEDE law allowing for expropriation and the visual representations of modern urban infrastructure stoke concerns over land rights and access to resources for those living in situations of irregularity.

5. Conclusion

In examining the experiences of GOF residents in the months following the ZEDE announcement, I argue that feminist geopolitics offers a useful lens through which to examine 'new city' projects. I highlight three main contributions. First, a feminist geopolitical perspective gives voice to the marginalized populations often erased in new city plans and representations, while highlighting the possibilities for counter-discourses and opposition organizing. Second, feminist geopolitics highlights how such marginal populations are diverse and emergently differentiated, as subject positions shift and are reshaped as they confront the circulating representations of the new city project. Third, in tracing the circulations of new city representations within particular communities, feminist geopolitics effectively shifts attention from the representations themselves to the material conditions and vulnerable corporealities with which they become entangled.

In this way, feminist geopolitics brings together the three primary strands of 'new city' scholarship, drawing myriad connections across work on new city representations (Jazeel 2015); new policies and governance frameworks (Datta 2017) and their use as geopolitical tools for neocolonial and neo-imperial endeavors (Moser 2018); and on the lived experiences (Smith 2017) and possibilities for resistance (Datta 2015; Kundu 2017) within communities facing displacement. This approach both recognizes the significance of *representations* of utopian urbanism, while destabilizing their discursive primacy and claims to inevitability. As such feminist geopolitics helps reframe these representations as "key battlegrounds for critical urban geography" (Jazeel 2015: 27) while pointing toward broader conversations around the future of cities and questions of citizenship, democracy, social difference, and individual and collective livelihoods.

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